

A LETTER to my Lords the Bishops,
concerning the Bill for preventing
Occasional Conformity. *is the bill of 27 Nov. 1703*

Maurice Morgan
My Lords,

Suffer your most Dutiful Son and Servant, who pays you all that Respect that belongs to your Learning and Vertues, together with that Obedience and Veneration, which by the command of Christ, and the Practice of His Church, is due to your Sacred Episcopal Character: Suffer one whose Charity inclines him to your Persons, and whose Judgment ties him to your Order, humbly to represent a few Considerations. For tho' your own Wisdoms may suggest much better Thoughts, yet possibly the Hurry of Business, and your Weighty Affairs both in Church and State, may keep you from Attending Actually, to what you Habitually know. Unless it be unadvisedly, and in the heat of Passion, for all Men have their Faults, tho' Good Men constantly strive to overcome them, and are not without Success; but no true Son of the Church of *England*, who is sensible of the near Relation he has to your Paternity, can imagine, or even suppose, that you have not very much at heart the Interests of that Church, *over which the Holy Acts: Ghost has made you Overseers, or that among your own selves there should ever* 28. *arise Men speaking perverse things;* but that, on the contrary, you will not only *Feed the Church of GOD,* that Church which is so dear to Him, that *He hath purchased it with His own Blood;* but will also do what in you lies to hinder those *Grievous Wolves from entring in among you, who will not spare the Flock.*

The Trust and the Obligation are undeniable; Spiritual Ties, and what is of more Weight with most Men, tho' not with your Lordships, Temporal Motives, such at least as are Fair and Honourable, engage you in the Churches Service. To enlarge her Borders, to assert her Cause, and to secure her Rights is indeed to serve your selves; it is to discharge your own Trusts, and to prepare a fair Account, when your Great Master shall call upon you for *Matt.* a Reckoning.

It is not therefore to be doubted, but that when you entred upon this Weighty and Important Office, an Office not more Venerable in it self, nor more Honour'd in this Nation by Temporal Distinctions, than it is difficult in the Execution; that you much more consider'd the Opportunities of doing Good, and the Pleasure and Reward that this affords you, than any secular Advantages and Marks of Honour. Nor is it to be thought, that Men of your Lordships Learning and Piety, wou'd engage in a Work, and in the most solemn manner be Consecrated to an Office, which you did not in your Judg-

Upon these Considerations, the Faithful Sons of the Church are Amaz'd and Griev'd, to find themselves differ in their Judgments from too many of your Lordships, as to those ways and Means which seem to them expedient, and ~~absolutely~~ necessary, both for the Security of the State, and for the Safety of that Church, of which under GOD, and the Queen, you are the Fathers and Governors. They never expected to hear a Bishop Argue against a Bill to this Purpose, and hope such an Example will never be made a Precedent; may it never be recorded in the Annals of the Church! And may no Historian ever think it worth the Mention! They cou'd not suppose, that all your Lordship's Care was spent upon the *Toleration Act*, but thought that a Share of it at least was reserv'd for the *Act of Uniformity*, which in Point of Conscience, is as obliging as ever. They hop'd therefore, that their Zeal for the Church might recommend them to your Blessing and Favour; but alas! to their great disappointment, they find, they have only incurr'd your Displeasure.

All this consider'd, they might well have been discourag'd in their Attempt to serve the Church, had not about a third of the Right Reverend Bishops concurr'd with them: And since the Nation is abundantly satisfied of the Real Merit, the Learning, Wisdom and Piety of those Renowned Prelates, they wonder the more why the rest of your Lordships shou'd be of a different Opinion.

Some have taken notice, that in Secular Affairs the Bench of Bishops usually go together. It is therefore so much the more strange, that you shou'd differ in a Business wherein the Church is so nearly concern'd; and consequently in which you should be the more competent Judges, and equally affected with Pious Zeal.

Others who are no Friends to your Lordship's Sacred Function and Dignity have maliciously observ'd, that you have always gone with the Court, and even, as they say, when it has been so mistaken in its measures, as not to fall in with the Interest of *England*. Let them never have occasion to say that you leave the Court, at a time when there is a better Reason than ever to adhere to it. Now that by the Goodness of GOD we have really upon the Throne, a *Most Religious and Gracious Sovereign*.

Those Gentlemen who have so heartily Espous'd the Bill, upon Examining their Hearts, find nothing there but a most sincere and worthy Intention, a Zeal, which seems to them according to Knowledge, And since your Lordships allow them a Judgment of Discretion, and do not require a blind Submission to your Dictates, but a Reverence to your Authority, supported by your Reasons, they Humbly beg to be convinc'd why you dislike their Measures, since it must not be suppos'd that you disapprove their End. For as for the Arguments that have been hitherto offer'd against the Bill, they are too Weak to pass with Persons of your Lordships Judgment and Learning. They may perhaps obtain among the Vulgar, who do not search after Reason, but are caught with Words and plausible Appearances; but they are as insipid Food to Men of Sense, as *Presbyterian Bread* and *Dissenting Water-Gruel*.

for that Reason be willing to leave a Breach in the Constitution, by which a set of Men might enter, who shou'd in time new Model the Church to their advantage: But your Lordships have too much Conscience to be content, that in any Age Wicked Men, under pretence of *abhorring Idols*, shou'd commit *Sacrilege*. And most of you having Posterity of your own, may be well enough pleas'd for this, as well as for better Reasons, that the succeeding Officers of the Church shou'd enjoy those Advantages on which you Live so Comfortably. But is it not Matter of the greatest Wonder that the *Lay* part of that Great Assembly, which with your Lordships make the *Three Estates* of this Nation, shou'd agree to a Bill to secure the Government in the Hands of the National Church, and Your Lordships Dissent Lose it?

As for Reasons of State and Motives of Interest, they are but Secondary Arguments with your Lordships. But what is it can hinder you from Discountenancing and Effectually Preventing a Practise which even the Temporal Lords allow to be a *Scandal to Religion*? A Practise which is a gross Profanation of our most Sacred Rites; which exposes Religion to Contempt; which plainly shews that Men have no serious Sense of it, but miserably make a Tool of it to promote their Secular Ends? Who is able to Discern what can hinder your Lordships from putting a stop to so great an Evil, unless you are pleased to condescend to inform him?

Among all the Sophisms that have been urg'd against the Bill, there is but one that has any pretence to weigh with your Lordships, which is, "That the Dissenters are coming into the Church, and that nothing but "terrifying Measures and Severity can prevent the happy Union. Now besides, that the Matter of Fact on which this Objection depends, wants to be Prov'd, and supposing it cou'd be Prov'd which no Body believes, (for *that the Heat and Fermentation which was rais'd by our Divisions*, is not at all abated, is but too visible) it does not follow that this Bill wou'd keep them out. Have the Dissenters been ask'd the Question? or does the Reason of the thing require it? Or is the keeping a *Hypocritical Dissenter* out of an Office; any Reason why a *Conscientious Dissenter* shou'd keep himself out of the Church? The Conscientious Dissenter Condemns this sort of Occasional Conformity, and therefore can take no Offence at the Bill. And your Lordships know very well, that the Bill does not at all affect any Dissenters but such as Conform for a Place only, and it can never be for the Churches Interest to gain such Profelytes as these. But I need not enlarge upon this Point which has been so very well argued by a better hand, Sir *Humphry Mackworth's*, in his Solid and Unanswerable Discourse about this Bill.

It is not to be suppos'd that your Lordships do not count them Schismatics, who without any just Cause separate from the Communion of their Lawful Bishop; or that you take the Church of *England* to be a Persecuting Church. You are the Governors of this Church, and since you do not find your selves dispos'd to Persecution, *Charity which thinketh no Evil*, will encline you to believe that none of your Brethren mean it. How can the Church be under more unhappy Circumstances than to stand Divided against it self? And what ill Impressions may it give Dissenters, to see the Fathers of the Church agree with those who accuse its Members of

Severities and Persecutions! The being call'd a Persecution, for it is suppos'd cry out of Persecution, were there a Law sure none of the Primitive Bishops wou'd reckon'd themselves Married to their first

This Bill will not at all hinder the good nor the Influence of your Exemplary Liv passion towards Dissenters, it only offers effectual. For Mens Attention is general Motives, which in some sort *Compel* them have been *like the deaf Adder*, and have *Charm'd ever so Wisely*.

It is to be wish'd that all Men were better ing, the Promoters of this Bill are Gentle who' all who profess a Zeal for the Church they shew however, some outward Rever speak of it with Contempt; do not make *cinianism*, and stickle to make Profelyte Profane Wit to Ridicule the Venerable My

'Tis true the Men of the other side, lay but I wou'd fain know whether Sedition and Moral Actions? To say nothing of F mary Swearing, which is too frequently fa Swears Rashly can be sure he is not perju justice to Creditors; Lying and Slandering tions of their Innocent Neighbours, and th ties? and is it not Scandalous to see the F pany, upon any Account but the Design o with Publicans and Sinners, to Heal and R

It is therefore Humbly hop'd, that since tion to this Bill gave so great a Scandal bot you will heartily and Unanimously come you will condescend to give us some good Refusal, for what Arguments we have hit to say, have not satisfied one Wise or Good



The End

he being debar'd of a Preferment cannot be suppos'd that none of your Lordships wou'd were a Law pass'd against *Translations*. I am suppos'd wou'd have complain'd, for they always have their first Flock.

For the good effects of your Lordships Doctrine, exemplary Lives, or Christian Charity and Comely offers a Motive to render all these more is generally Rous'd and Fix't by Temporal *impel* them to consider, who otherwise might, and have *stopped their Ears*, tho' you had

were better Christians, but generally speak- re Gentlemen of the fairest Characters. And the Church are not such as they ought to be, and Reverence for Religion; they do not make open profession of *Deism*, and So- Profelytes to these Opinions; nor use their venerable Mysteries of Religion.

side, lay Claim to Humanity and Morality; Sedition and Faction are Benefits to Mankind, thing of Fornication and Adultery; Cust- quently false Swearing, at least no Man who not perjur'd; Luxuriousness and Riot; In- Slandering; False and Groundless Defama- rs, and the Like. Are not these Immorali- to see the Fathers of the Church in such Com- e Design of their Great Master in Conversing eal and Reform them?

that since your Lordships former Opposi- scandal both to Church-Men and Dissenters; ally come into it this Session. Or else that some good and sufficient Reasons for your have hitherto met with, one may venture e or Good Man in the Nation.



The End.